

Lancashire CLA Sufficiency Strategy

2021 – 2024

Version 4 – April 2023

Updated from original Strategy agreed by Cabinet on 14th Jan 2021.



INTRODUCTION

Lancashire County Council is helping to make Lancashire the best place to live, work, visit and prosper, where everyone acts responsibly.

We will work together with our partners in supportive, innovative, respectful and collaborative ways to ensure that children, young people and their families are safe, healthy and achieve their full potential.

We aim to deliver purposeful practice focused on prevention, participation and permanence by:

- Delivering the right service, at the right time, by the right people through effective wellbeing, preventative strategies and interventions.
- Building on the strengths of families.
- Engaging children and young people through effective participation activities.
- Meeting and surpassing statutory expectations.
- At every stage, actively considering, developing and delivering clear plans to achieve permanence.

We will ensure that everything we do makes a tangible, positive difference to the lives of the children we work for and that we intervene at the lowest and least intrusive level possible.

Lancashire County Council has a statutory duty to ensure that there is a range of local homes available, sufficient to meet the needs of the children and young people in the care of the local authority; and to promote co-operation with relevant partners to improve the well-being of children in the local area.

This strategy sets out how Lancashire County Council intends to meet its Sufficiency Duty for the children we look after, improve the quality and choice of homes, ensure value for money and minimise the likelihood of suitable homes not being available locally.

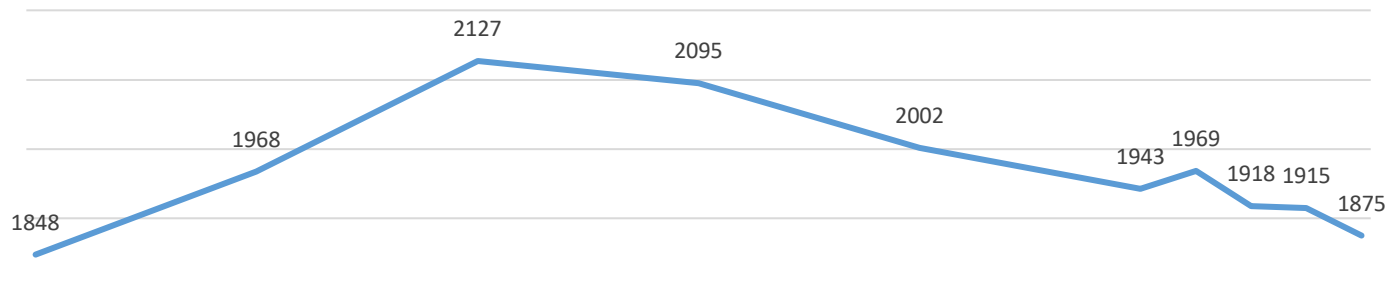
ANALYSIS OF OUR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER (CLA)

NUMBERS OF CHILDREN IN CARE

Between March 2017 and March 2022, the number of CLA in England rose by 13%, compared to 5% in Lancashire. In 2017/18 and 2018/19, Lancashire's increase in CLA was considerably higher than the national average (*6.5% in 2017/18 and 8.1% in 2018/19, compared to a 4% rise nationally in both 2017/18 and 2018/19*). However, since 2019/20, the number of CLA in Lancashire has decreased (*by 1.5% in 2019/20, 4.4% in 2020/21 and 2.9% in 2021/22*) compared to a continued rise nationally (*2% in 2019/20; 1% in 2020/21 and 2% in 2021/22*).

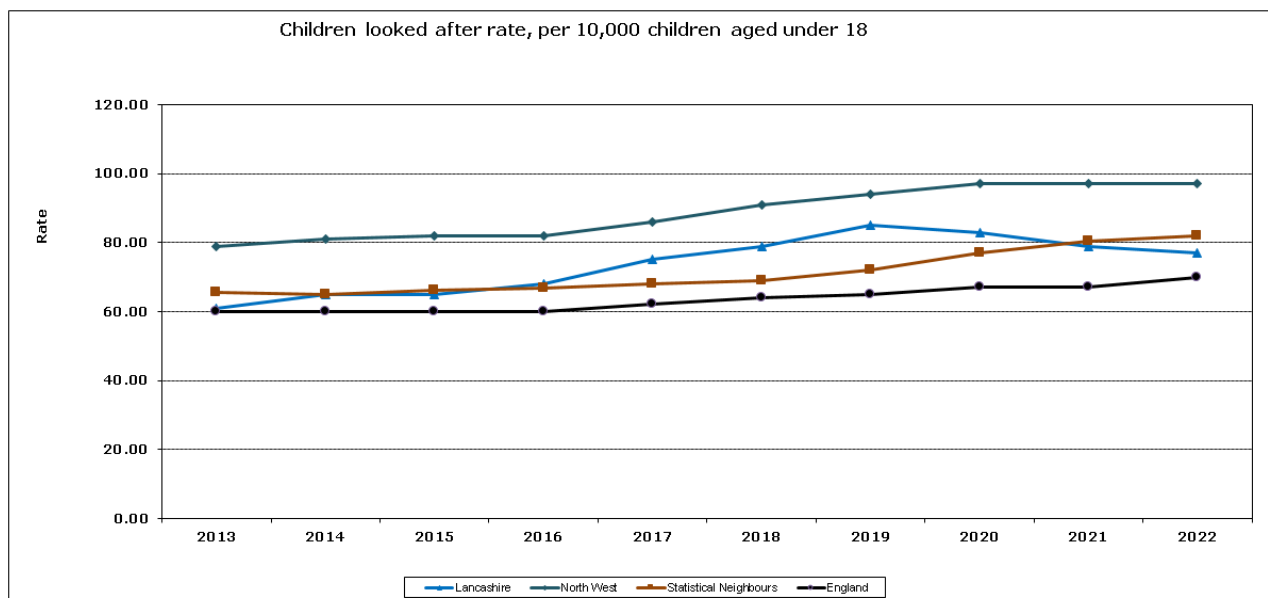
The decreasing trend in Lancashire has continued for most of 2022/23. On 31 March 2023, Lancashire had 1875 CLA (*a 3.5% reduction during 2022/23*), which further reduces the rise in CLA in Lancashire to 1.5% since March 2017.

Number of CLA in Lancashire



	Mar-17	Mar-18	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Jun-22	Sep-22	Dec-22	Mar-23
Number of CLA in Lancashire	1848	1968	2127	2095	2002	1943	1969	1918	1915	1875

RATE OF CHILDREN IN CARE



Between 2017 and 2019, the rate of CLA in England (per 10,000 population) increased from 62 to 65 (an increase in the rate of 3) and the Lancashire's Statistical Neighbours average rate increased from 68 to 72 (an increase of 4). The average increase in the rate over the same period across the North West region was higher than both the national and Statistical Neighbour increased rate (from 86 to 94 - an increase of 8). However, Lancashire saw an even higher increase in the rate of CLA (from 75 to 85, an increase of 10).

However, between 2019 to 2021, Lancashire's rate of CLA fell (by 5 to 79.7), in comparison to a continued rise in England (up 2 to 67) and a continued larger than the national average rise in both the North West and Statistical Neighbour rates (up 6 regionally and up 8 for Statistical Neighbours). By March 2021, Lancashire's rate of CLA was comparable to rates in March 2018 and were below the Statistical Neighbour rate for the first time since 2015/16.

By March 2022, Lancashire's rate of CLA had fallen further (down 3 to 76.9), compared to a continued rise in both the National and Statistic Neighbour rates and a plateau of the North West rate.

Lancashire's rate of CLA fell again by March 2023 to 74.8 (down 2 since March 2022).

GENDER

56% of CLA in England are male and 44% are female (March 2021). These proportions have varied little over recent years. Lancashire has a lower proportion of males in the CLA population than the national average (around 53%-54%), which has also varied little over recent years:

	31/03/2017	31/03/2018	31/03/2019	31/03/2020	31/03/2021	31/03/2022	31/03/2023
Male	989	1060	1133	1100	1075	1047	1009
Female	859	908	993	986	921	891	858
Indeterminate			2	6	6	5	8
Total	1848	1968	2128	2095	2022	1943	1875
% Male	53.5%	53.9%	53.2%	52.5%	53.7%	53.9%	53.8%

AGE

The largest age group for CLA nationally is those aged 10-15 years (39%). This is also the largest age group for CLA in Lancashire (39% in March 2020 and 2021, increased to 42% in March 2022 and 41% in March 2023).

A higher proportion of CLA nationally are aged 16 and over (25% as of March 2022) compared to Lancashire, but the proportion of CLA aged 16 years and over in Lancashire has been increasing year on year (from 17% in March 2020 to 22% in March 2023).

In March 2020, a higher proportion of Lancashire CLA were aged under 10 in comparison to the national average (44% in Lancashire, compared to 36% nationally). The proportion of CLA aged under 10 nationally increased to 38% in March 2021 and to 37% in March 2022. However, the proportion of CLA aged under 10 in Lancashire has decreased (41% in March 2021; 39% in March 2022; and 38% in March 2023) and is now more in line with the national average.

Age range	March 2020		March 2021		March 2022		March 2023
	Nationally	Lancashire	Nationally	Lancashire	Nationally	Lancashire	Lancashire
Under 1	5%	7%	5%	4%	5%	5%	5%
Aged 1-4	13%	16%	14%	15%	14%	14%	14%
Aged 5-9	18%	21%	19%	22%	18%	20%	19%
Aged 10-15	39%	39%	39%	39%	39%	42%	41%
Aged 16+	24%	17%	23%	19%	25%	20%	22%

ETHNICITY

The ethnicity of Lancashire's CLA continues to be predominately white ethnicity, representing 84.7% of the total CLA population (March 2023). This proportion has been reducing (87.0% in March 2020, 85.7% in March 2021 and 85.2% in March 2022). This is an over-representation when compared to the general CYP population in Lancashire who are of white ethnicity, as reported in the 2021 census (81.9%).

As of March 2023, 6.9% of Lancashire CLA were of mixed ethnicity. This group is over-represented when compared to the general CYP population (4.0% - 2021 census). The proportion of Lancashire CLA who were mixed ethnicity has fluctuated (6.4% in March 2020, 6.7% in March 2021 and 7.5% in March 2022).

As of March 2023, 3.7% of Lancashire CLA were of Asian ethnicity. This group is under-represented when compared to the general CYP population (12.5% - 2021 census). The proportion of Lancashire CLA who were of Asian ethnicity has been reducing (4.8% in March 2020 and 2021 and 4.2% in March 2022).

As of March 2023, 1.4% of Lancashire CLA were of black ethnicity, which is in line with the general CYP population (0.7% - 2021 census). The proportion of Lancashire CLA who were of black ethnicity has been increasing (from 0.4% in March 2020 and 2021 and 1% in March 2022).

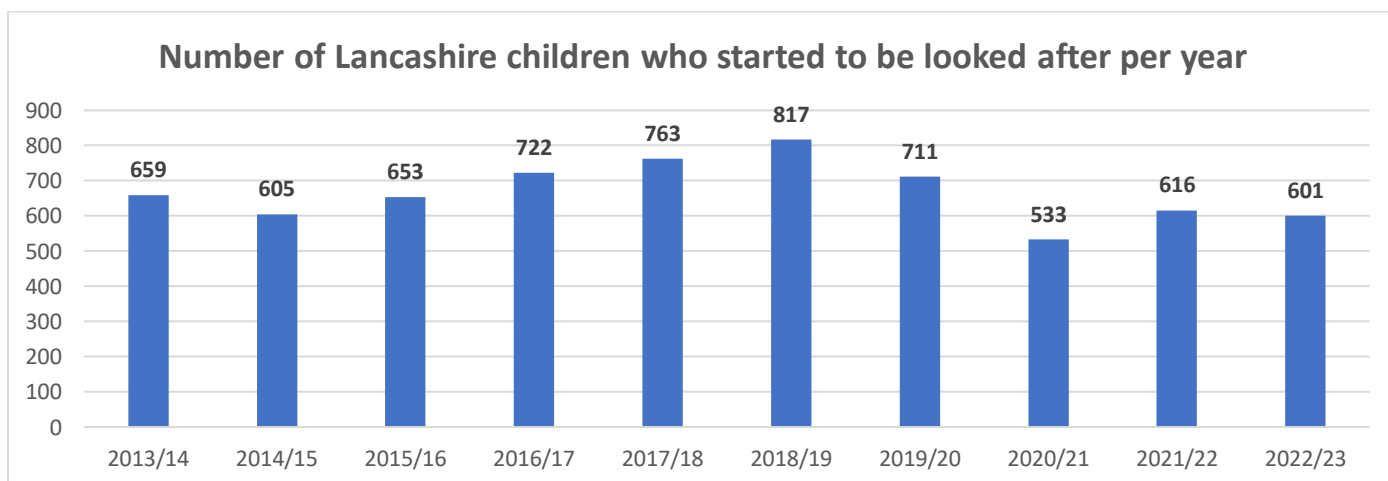
The proportion of CLA whose ethnicity was classed as 'any other ethnic group' has risen to 2.8% in March 2023 (from 1% in March 2020, to 1.5% in March 2021, and to 2% in March 2022) - compared to 1.0% of general CYP population in 2021 census.

STARTED TO BE LOOKED AFTER

In the two-year period 2016/17 to 2018/19, the number of children who started to be looked after in Lancashire increased by 13.2% (compared to a decrease of 3.8% nationally, a decrease of 3.9% regionally and a decrease of 3.7% for Statistical Neighbours). However, during 2019/20, the number of children who started to be looked after in Lancashire reduced significantly (by 13%, compared to a reduction of 3% nationally) to lower levels than the previous three years.

A significantly lower number of children also started to be looked after in Lancashire during 2020/21 (down 25%, compared to a reduction of 8% nationally), with the lowest numbers during Quarter 4, following the reorganisation of Children's Social Care and the introduction of the Family Safeguarding model.

The number of children who started to be looked after in 2021/22 and 2022/23, (although higher than in 2020/21) remained at lower levels than other previous years, and comparable to the number of children who started to be looked after in 2014/15.

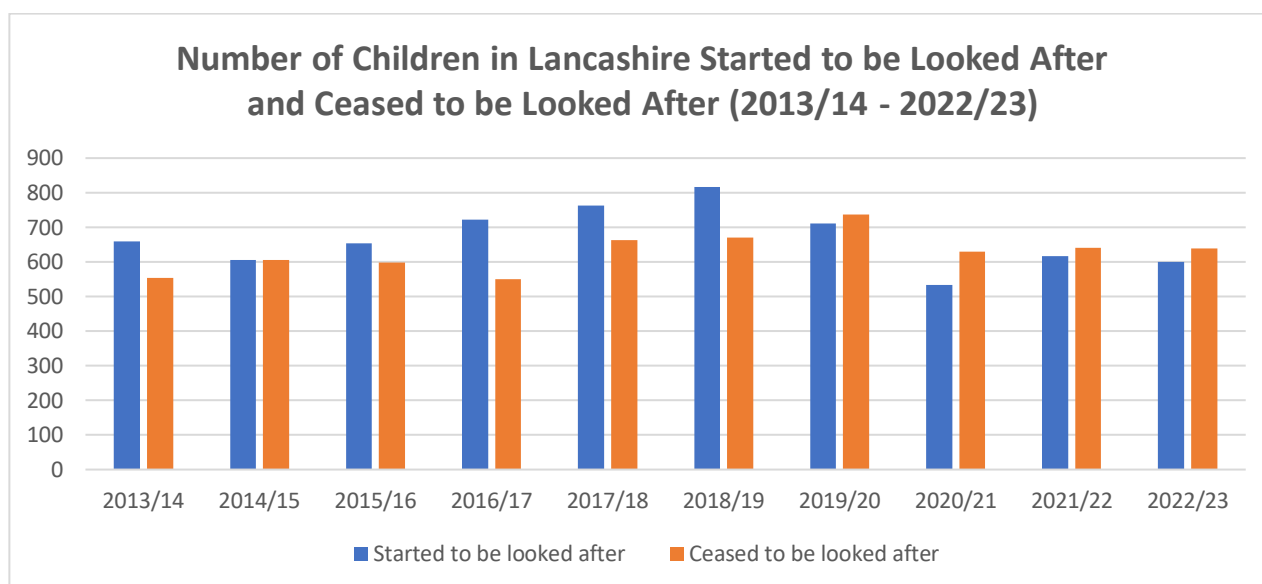


CEASED TO BE LOOKED AFTER

There was a significant increase in the number of children who ceased to be looked after in Lancashire between 2016/17 to 2018/19 (21.8%), compared to a much smaller increase across the region (1.1%) and a 6.2% reduction nationally. During 2019/20, the number who ceased to be looked after in Lancashire increased by a further 10% (compared to no change nationally) and for the first time since 2014/15, the number of children who ceased to be looked after was higher than the number of children who started to be looked after.

A significantly lower number of children ceased to be looked after in Lancashire during 2020/21 (down 14.5% compared to a decrease of 6% nationally). However, the number of children who ceased to be looked after in Lancashire in 2021/22 increased slightly (up 1.6%) and continued to be higher than the number of children who started to be looked after. A similar number of Lancashire children ceased to be looked after in 2022/23.

	2013/14	2014/15	2015/16	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20	2020/21	2021/22	2022/23
Ceased to be CLA	553	606	598	550	663	670	737	630	640	639



The proportion of children who ceased to be looked after because of a return home to live with

Reason for ceasing to be looked after	% in 2019/2020	% in 2020/21	% in 2021/22	% in 2022/23
SGO	17%	21%	19%	16%
Adoption	12%	10%	11%	6%
Return home to parents, either planned or unplanned (no order)	13%	15%	17%	19%

parents (either on a planned or unplanned basis with no order) has increased from 13% in 2019/20 to 19% in 2022/23. The proportion of children who ceased to be looked after because of adoption has halved during this same period (from 12% to 6%).

SECTION 20 AGREEMENTS

In recent years (following a family court ruling in 2015 on the use of voluntary agreements) there has been an increase nationally in both the number and proportion of children looked after under a care order, and a decrease in the number and proportion looked after under a voluntary agreement (under section 20 of the Children Act 1989).

However, nationally, the proportion of CLA cared for under a voluntary agreement rose from 15% in March 2021 to 17% in March 2022, reflecting the increase in UASC who are usually voluntarily accommodated. Lancashire's proportion of CLA cared for under a voluntary agreement also rose (from 7% in March 2021, to 7.8% in March 2022 and to 9.8% by March 2023).

Most of the Lancashire CLA who are looked after under a voluntary agreement are aged 16-17 years, although this proportion has been falling over the last few years (from 71.8% in March 2020

to 66.9% in March 2022 and to 65% in March 2023). The proportion of 14-15 year olds cared for under a voluntary agreement has been increasing (from 12.8% in March 2020 to 19.6% in March 2022, although slightly reduced to 17.5% in March 2023). The proportion of 0-5 year olds cared for under a voluntary agreement increased significantly as of 31 March 2023 to 9.3% (from 6.8% in March 2022).

Age range of CLA accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Age Range	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/20	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/21	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/22	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/23
0-5 years	9 (5.8%)	8 (5.7%)	10 (6.8%)	17 (9.3%)
6-10 years	5 (3.2%)	6 (4.3%)	3 (2.0%)	2 (1.1%)
11-13 years	10 (6.4%)	10 (7.1%)	7 (4.7%)	10 (5.5%)
14-15 years	20 (12.8%)	22 (15.7%)	29 (19.6%)	32 (17.5%)
16-17 years	112 (71.8%)	94 (67.1%)	99 (66.9%)	119 (65.0%)
TOTAL	156	140	148	183

The proportion of Section 20 CLA who are voluntarily accommodated in Lancashire as part of the Homeless Protocol has been steadily falling in recent years, from 30% (47) in March 2020 to 18.6% (26) in March 2021, to 16.9% (25) in March 2022 and to 13.1% (24) in March 2023.

The largest proportion of CLA who are voluntarily accommodated in Lancashire are placed in supported accommodation/ independent living provision (40.1%). Significantly more Section 20 CLA were placed in agency children's home provision as of March 2022 (41 - 27.7%) compared to previous years. However, the number and proportion reduced (to 34 and 18.6%) by March 2023.

Type of home lived in by children who are accommodated under Section 20 Agreement

Type of Provision	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/20	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/21	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/22	Number and % of s20 CLA at 31/03/23
Agency Leaving Care	44 (28.2%)	44 (31.4%)	35 (23.6%)	57 (31.1%)
Block Supported Accommodation	39 (25%)	17 (12.1%)	16 (10.8%)	18 (9.8%)
Agency Children's Homes	25 (16.1%)	25 (17.9%)	41 (27.7%)	34 (18.6%)
In-House Fostering	20 (12.8%)	26 (18.6%)	22 (14.9%)	20 (10.9%)
Agency Fostering	10 (6.4%)	7 (5%)	15 (10.1%)	21 (11.8%)
In-House Residential	7 (4.5%)	10 (7.1%)	12 (8.1%)	13 (7.1%)
Residential School	7 (4.5%)	4 (2.9%)	5 (3.4%)	3 (1.6%)
Other	4 (2.6%)	7(5%)	2 (1.4%)	17 (9.3%)
TOTAL	156	140	148	183

LOCATION OF HOMES

Nationally, 56% of CLA live within their home local authority boundaries (March 2022, down slightly from 57% in March 2021). Lancashire performs much better than the national average, with 81% living within Lancashire County Council boundaries in March 2023, an increase from 78% in March 2022 (excluding those in confidential addresses). 10% of home addresses in March 2023 were recorded as confidential.

Most of the remaining Lancashire CLA live in other North West Local Authorities or Yorkshire towns close to the Lancashire border. The number of CLA living further afield remains low and has reduced to 35 in March 2023 (compared to 51 in March 2020, 54 in March 2021 and 56 in March 2022).

The largest proportion of children living at a distance from Lancashire are with agency foster carers (49% in March 2023 – 17 children). 9 of the 17 children are living with connected carers, with support being provided to the carers by an agency fostering provider, as the distance is too great for the carers to be effectively supported by Lancashire's in-house fostering service. 5 of the 17 children are part of 2 larger sibling groups and the homes at a distance were the only ones available that could allow the siblings to remain together. The remaining 3 children are living at a distance due to family links in the area.

Despite continued, very challenging market conditions, the number of Lancashire children placed at a distance in agency children's homes has reduced back down to 4 in March 2023, following a significant increase in March 2022 to 12 (compared to 3 in March 2020 and 4 in March 2021).

Type of Home	Living at a distance (March 2020)	Living at a distance (March 2021)	Living at a distance (March 2022)	Living at a distance (March 2023)
Independent Fostering Agency (IFA)	20 (39.2%)	22 (40.7%)	19 (33.9%)	17 (48.6%)
Placed with Parents	10 (19.6%)	11 (20.4%)	9 (16.1%)	2 (5.7%)
Connected Carers	7 (13.7%)	5 (9.3%)	6 (10.7%)	4 (11.4%)
In-House Foster Carer	0%	0%	0%	2 (5.7%)
Family Assessment Centre	6 (11.8%)	3 (5.6%)	4 (7.1%)	1 (2.9%)
OTHER (Hospital, remand, secure welfare, overnight short break, Reg 38.6, other)	4 (7.8%)	8 (14.8%)	5 (8.9%)	3 (8.6%)
Agency Children's Homes	3 (5.9%)	4 (7.4%)	12 (21.4%)	4 (11.4%)
Agency Leaving Care	1 (2%)	1 (1.9%)	1 (1.8%)	2 (5.7%)
TOTAL	51	54	56	35

UNACCOMPANIED ASYLUM-SEEKING CHILDREN (UASC)

The number of unaccompanied asylum-seeking children being cared for by Lancashire County Council has risen significantly in recent years:

YEAR	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
No of LCC USAC	1	3	1	12	15	15	17	27	43

As of June 2023, Lancashire County Council was supporting 57 UASC under section 20 of the Children Act 1989 and 96 UASC Care Leavers.

Most of these children were aged 16-17 at the time of arrival, with only two being younger (aged 14). Most of our UASC are male (only 2 have been female since reporting began). Most of our UASC arrive individually - there has only been 3 sibling groups arrive in total since records began. Currently, on average 3 new UASC per month become cared for by Lancashire County Council. Numbers do vary based on the National Transfer Scheme rota and several presentations have been from the dispersal accommodation in North Lancashire.

Most of our USAC are placed in semi-independent and supported accommodation type homes. 4 children have been placed in foster care due age and the need for care in a regulated setting. Most of the young people are very self-sufficient and have not required any extra support other than that delivered from universal services.

Whilst in the main, we do not struggle to find suitable homes for our UASC, growing numbers means that further homes that specialise in caring for this cohort of young people and have knowledge of the immigration process would be beneficial.

OUTCOMES FOR OUR CHILDREN LOOKED AFTER

Lancashire CLA are:

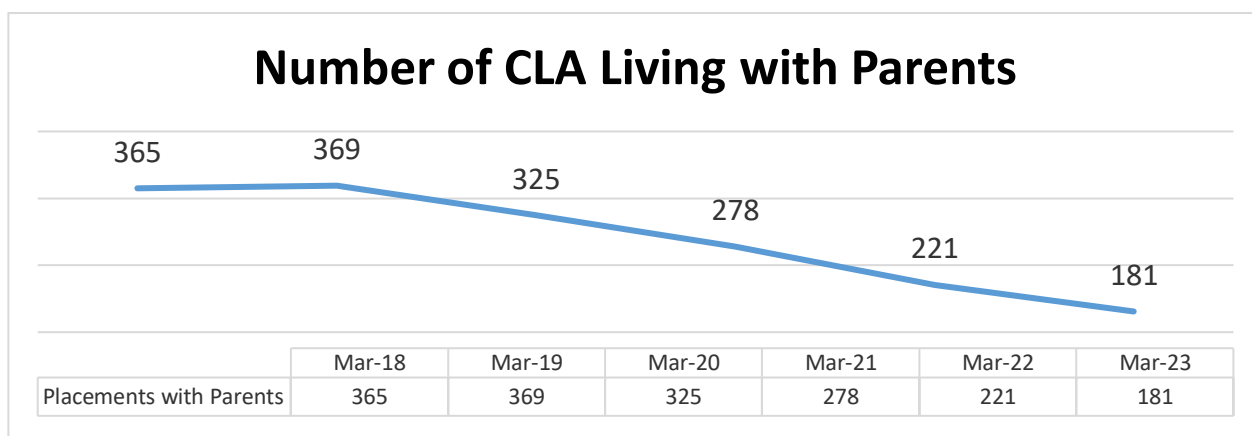
- More likely to reach the expected standard at KS2 in reading, writing and maths than statistical and regional neighbours and below the national average (based on latest available data – 21/22 published data cancelled).
- Likely to progress better in school than the national, regional or statistical neighbour averages.
- More likely to achieve a higher level of attainment at KS4 than the region or statistical neighbours.
- Less likely to be excluded from school than statistical or regional neighbours and the exclusion rate is lower than the national average.
- Less likely to have a SEN with an EHCP than the regional average and less likely to have a SEN without an EHCP than the regional or national average.
- Less likely than the regional, national and statistical neighbour averages of being subject to a conviction, final warning or reprimand.
- Less likely than children from statistical neighbours and national averages to achieve a score on the SDQ that is 'slightly higher' but more likely than regionally.
- More likely to have a missing incident higher than regional or national averages.
- Less likely than the national average to have 3 or more homes in a year.
- Less likely to be placed 20 miles or more from home than the regional, statistical neighbour or national averages.
- More likely than the regional, national and statistical neighbour averages to have been in the same home for 2 years.

ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT TYPES OF HOME AND CURRENT PROVISION

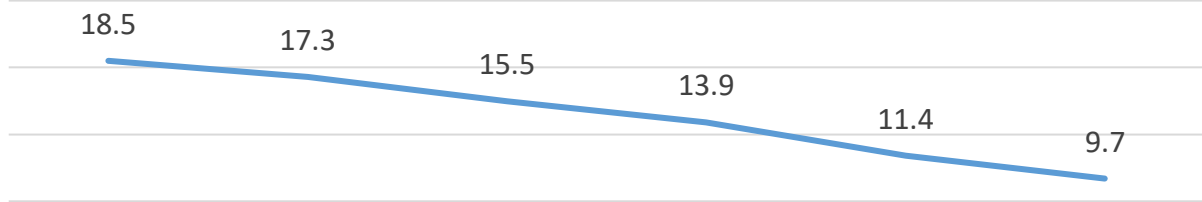
LIVING WITH PARENTS OR OTHER PERSON WITH PARENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

Between 2012 and 2018, Lancashire experienced a significant increase in the number of CLA living with parents or other person with parental responsibility, with the proportion almost doubling from 9.6% in March 2012 to 18.5% in March 2018. This was significantly higher than the proportion nationally (6% as of March 2018) and higher than the proportion regionally (12.5%). The number of CLA living with parents nationally has since increased to 7% (March 2022).

Targeted work in Lancashire to reduce the proportion of CLA living with parents has been successful. As of 31 March 2022, there were 144 less CLA living with parents, compared to March 2018. By 31 March 2022, the proportion had reduced to 11.4%. The reduction in the number and proportion of CLA living with parents has continued in 2022/23, with 40 fewer children and a proportion similar to that seen in March 2012, prior to the significant increase (9.7%).



% of CLA Living with Parents



	Mar-18	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23
% of CLA placed with parents	18.5	17.3	15.5	13.9	11.4	9.7

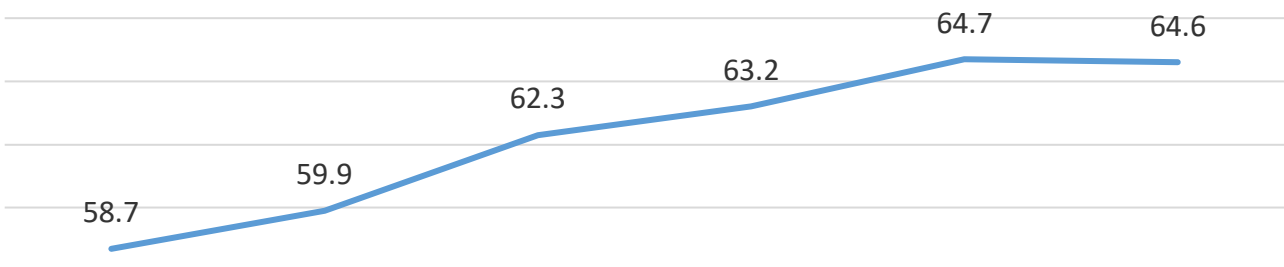
FOSTER CARE

Between 2016-2019, the proportion of children in foster care nationally fell (from 74% to 72%). Lancashire's proportion also fell (*from 66% to 60%*). By March 2022, the proportion nationally had fallen further to 70%. However, the proportion of children in foster care in Lancashire has steadily increased, initially due to rising numbers of children in foster homes (*during 2019/20 and the first half of 2020/21*) and latterly due to the number of children in foster homes falling at a slower rate than the number of CLA overall. By March 2022 the proportion of CLA in Lancashire in foster care had risen to 64.7%.

There has been a further fall in the number of Lancashire children in foster homes during 2022/23 (*46 less*) but the higher reduction in CLA overall has meant that the proportion of children in foster homes had only fallen very slightly (*to 64.6%*) by March 2023.

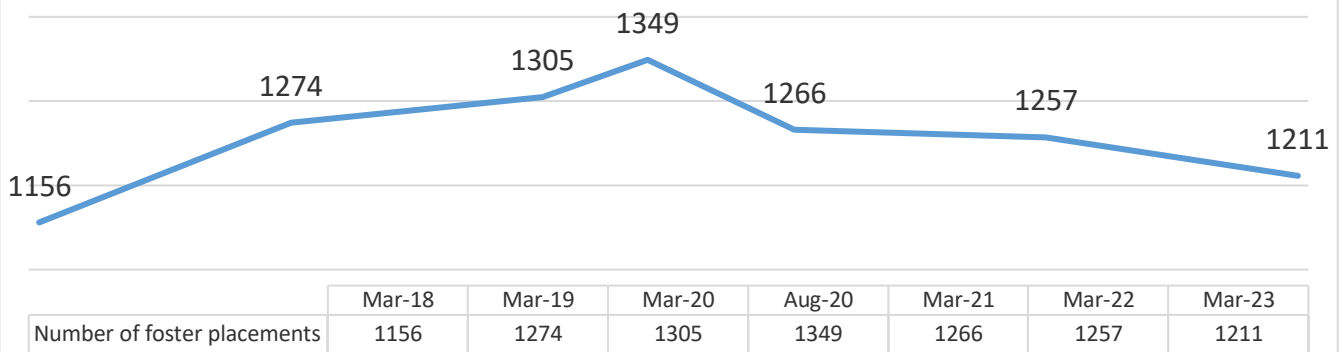
73% of Lancashire children living with a foster carer live within Lancashire County Council's boundaries (*March 2023*). This has increased from 71% in March 2020, driven by the increase in children living with connected (kinship) carers (who are more likely to live within LCC's boundaries). In both years, an additional 11% of foster home addresses were confidential.

% of Lancashire CLA in Foster Homes



	Mar-18	Mar-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23
% of Lancashire CLA in fostering placements	58.7	59.9	62.3	63.2	64.7	64.6

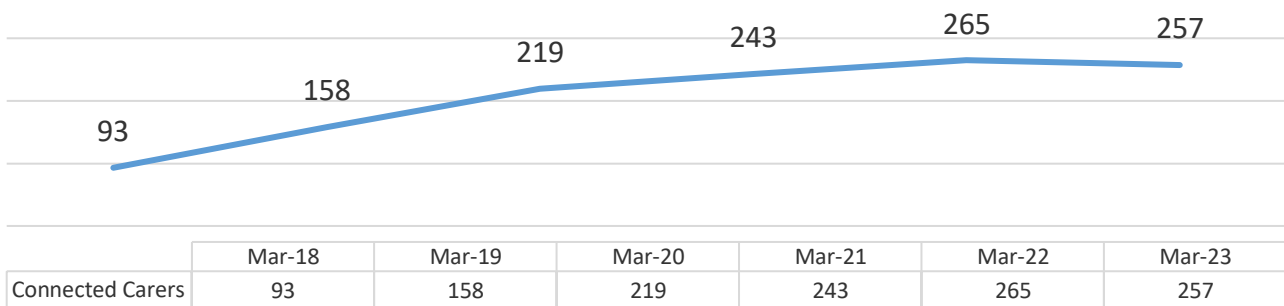
Number of Children in Foster Homes



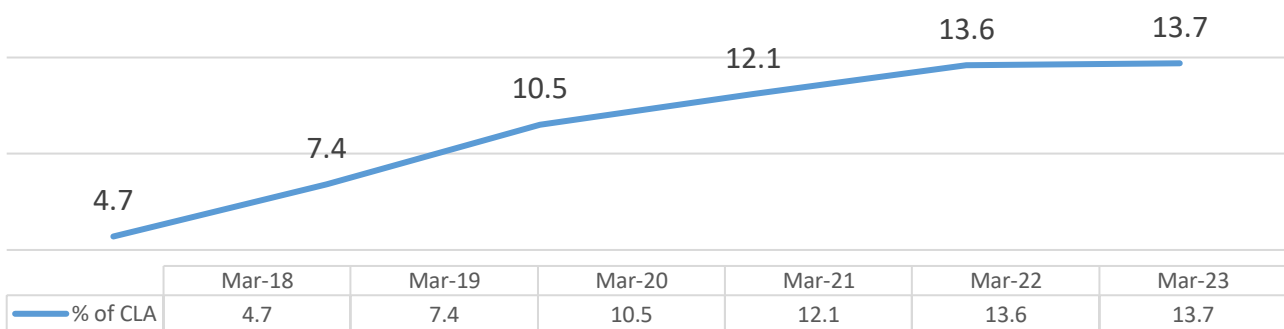
CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

Most of the increase of children living in foster homes in Lancashire is due to a significant rise in the number of children living with connected (kinship) carers, which has almost trebled since 2018. The proportion of Lancashire CLA living with a connected carer has increased from 4.7% in March 2018 to 13.7% by March 2023, now more in line with the national average (15% in March 2022 – was 13% in March 2018).

Number of Children living with Connected Foster Carers

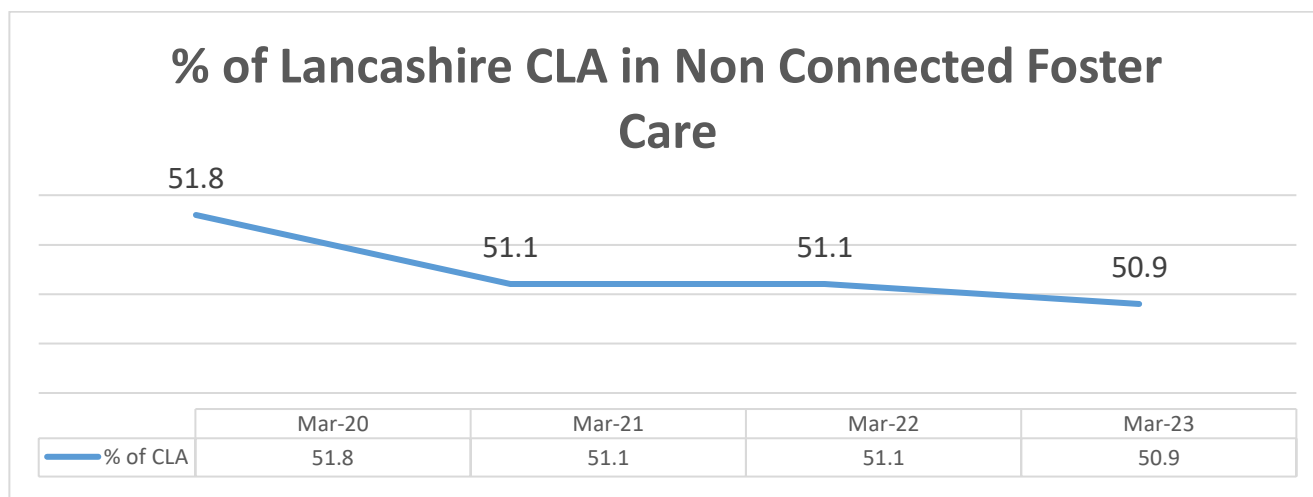


% of Lancashire CLA living with Connected Foster Carers

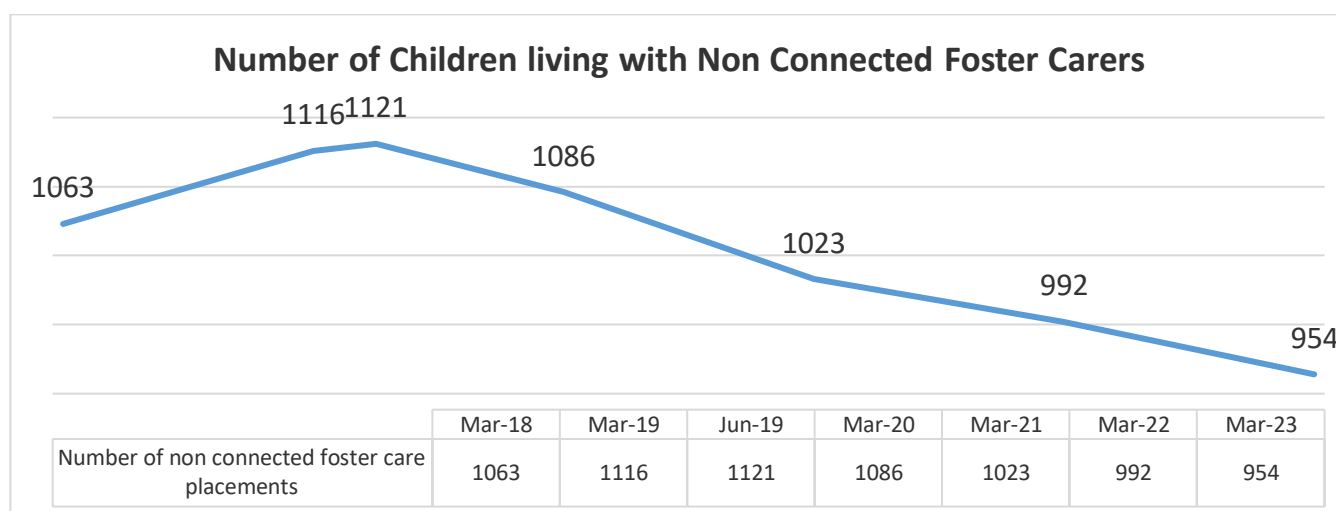


NON-CONNECTED FOSTER CARERS

Nationally, the proportion of children living with non-connected foster carers has been falling (*from 57% in March 2020 to 55% in March 2022*). The proportion in Lancashire has also been falling but at a slower rate (*from 51.8% in March 2020 to 51.1% in March 2022*). The proportion in Lancashire has continued to fall during 2022/23 and was at 50.9% in March 2023.

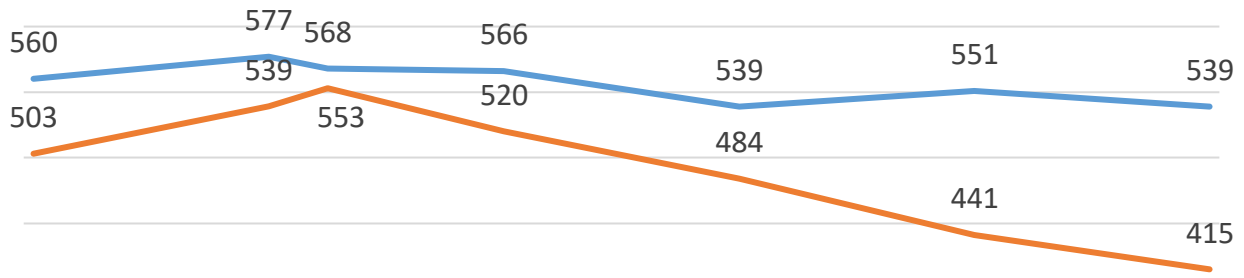


The number of children living with non-connected foster carers in Lancashire peaked in June 2019 (*at 1121*) but has fallen significantly since, to 954 by March 2023. The decrease in children living with non-connected foster carers has been largely driven by a significant decrease in the number of children living in homes with Independent Fostering Agencies (IFA) carers (*88 less children living with IFA carers in March 2023 than in March 2018, compared to 21 less children living with in-house carers during the same period*).



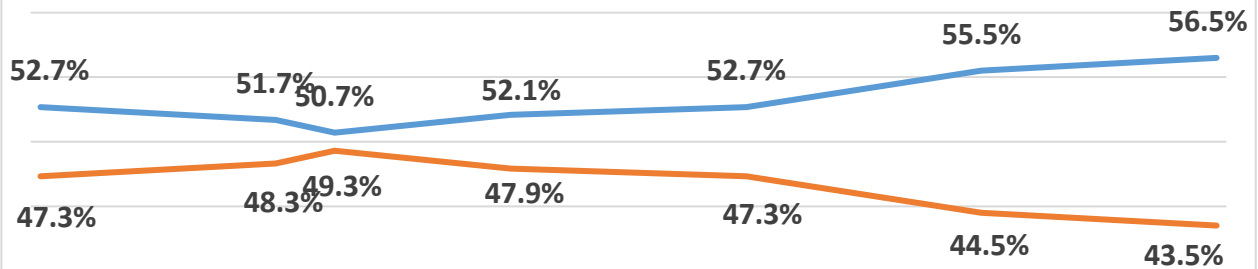
According to The Fostering in England Report (2022), IFAs provide 45% of the homes for children living with non-connected foster carers nationally (*an increase from 35% in 2019*). At the peak in June 2019, the proportion of children living with in-house non-connected foster carers to IFA foster carers in Lancashire was not far from an equal split (*50.7% in-house compared to 49.3% IFA*), far higher than the national average at the time. Due to a greater reduction of Lancashire CLA living with IFA carers (*down 138 since June 2019*) compared to in-house carers (*down 29 since June 2019*), the proportion of children living with an IFA carer decreased to 43.5% by March 2023 and is now more in line with the national average.

Number of Children living with In-house and Independent Fostering Agency (IFA) Non Connected Foster Carers



	Mar-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23
In House non connected carers	560	577	568	566	539	551	539
IFA placements	503	539	553	520	484	441	415

% of Non-Connected Carers (In-House v IFAs)



	Mar-18	Mar-19	Jun-19	Mar-20	Mar-21	Mar-22	Mar-23
In-house	52.7%	51.7%	50.7%	52.1%	52.7%	55.5%	56.5%
IFA	47.3%	48.3%	49.3%	47.9%	47.3%	44.5%	43.5%

The sharpest fall in children living with IFA carers in Lancashire has been since the start of 2020. Alongside an overall drop in demand for foster homes for younger aged children, this is likely due to the refined home finding processes introduced in Lancashire in late 2019, which has seen the in-house fostering service expected to provide homes for all children aged 0-5 years (unless the child is part of a large sibling group, there is a significant complex health need or a parent and child foster home is required). This was extended to foster homes for all children aged 0-8 in July 2020. As a result, by March 2023, IFAs were caring for 7.4% of children in non-connected fostering (aged 0-5 years) compared to 27.2% in June 2019 and 39.8% of children (aged 6-10), compared to 48.4% in June 2019.

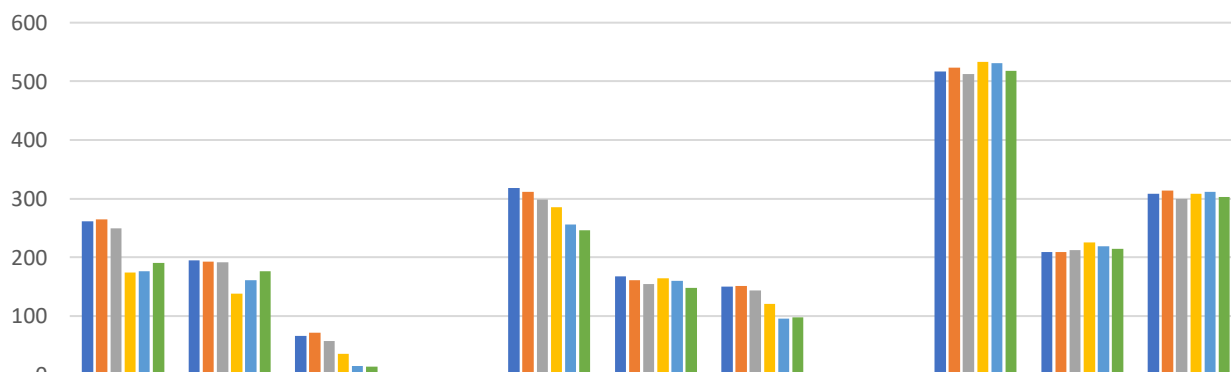
Number and % of children in non-connected foster homes cared for by IFAs

	0-5 IFA	% 0-5s Placed in IFAs	6-10 IFA	% 6-10s Placed in IFAs	11+ IFAs	% 11+ Placed in IFAs
Mar-19	66	25.3%	150	47.2%	308	59.6%
Jun-19	72	27.2%	151	48.4%	314	60.0%
Mar-20	57	22.9%	144	48.2%	300	58.6%
Mar-21	36	20.7%	121	42.5%	308	57.8%
Mar-22	15	8.5%	96	37.5%	312	58.8%
Mar-23	14	7.4%	98	39.8%	303	58.5%

Overall, between June 2019 and March 2023, there has been an 81% reduction in the number of children aged 0-5 living with an IFA carer; a 35% reduction in the number of children aged 6-10

living with an IFA carer; and a much smaller reduction in the number of children aged 11+ living with an IFA carer (3.5%).

**Age range of children living with non-connected foster carers
(split between in-house and IFA)**



	Total 0-5s	0-5 In-House	0-5 IFAs	Total 6-10s	6-10 In-House	6-10s IFAs	Total 11+	11+ In-House	11+ IFAs
Mar-19	261	195	66	318	168	150	517	209	308
Jun-19	265	193	72	312	161	151	523	209	314
Mar-20	249	192	57	299	155	144	512	212	300
Mar-21	174	138	36	285	164	121	533	225	308
Mar-22	176	161	15	256	160	96	531	219	312
Mar-23	190	176	14	246	148	98	518	215	303

Agency Foster Care Costs

The annualised cost of agency foster homes has reduced by £3.5m between June 2019 and March 2023 (from £22.1m to £18.6m). This largely mirrors the overall fall in children living with IFA carers (from 553 to 415 - down 138). The average cost of a child being cared for by an agency foster carer increased from £770 per week in June 2019 to £805 in March 2022. This is likely because of an increased proportion of older age children living with an IFA carer (which cost more) and the increased use of higher cost foster homes, which have either enabled a young person to step down from a residential home into fostering or prevented a move into a residential home.

The average cost of a children being cared for by an agency foster carer has further increased to £860 per week in March 2023, due to the introduction of new commissioning arrangements (former arrangements had expired) and the decision to provide an annual fee uplift to IFAs in line with inflation.

Location of Non-Connected Foster Homes

70% of Lancashire children living with a non-connected carer (both in-house and IFA) live within the County Council's boundaries (March 2023). This is the same as in March 2020. In both years 13% of foster home addresses were marked as confidential.

Theoretically, Lancashire has enough non-connected foster carers to meet need. As of September 2019, the number of CLA placed in non-connected foster homes within Lancashire (1330) was 25% higher than the total number of Lancashire CLA placed in non-connected foster homes (1065). 60% of IFA homes within Lancashire (475) were being used by children from other local authorities,

suggesting that there was opportunity to further increase the number of local IFA homes being used for Lancashire children.

Targeted work with IFAs has seen the proportion of Lancashire children in an IFA home within the County Council's boundaries increase - from 61% in March 2020 to 64% in March 2023 (*in both years, 9% of IFA foster home addresses were marked as confidential*). Work with IFAs will continue to explore how greater use can be made of local foster homes for Lancashire children.

Findings from a Fostering Feasibility Study undertaken in 2019/20, funded through the DfE project: *Improving Commissioning and Sufficiency Planning to Increase Stability and Permanence for Looked After Children (Fostering)*, suggest that a further increase in children in foster homes and local sufficiency in Lancashire will not only require a focus on recruiting new foster carer households but also on making better use of existing local IFA carers:

'... In the context of the current local, regional and national levels of non-connected fostering household growth it will take many years to achieve a significant change in the fostering sufficiency picture through this route alone, particularly if it is predicated upon mainly local authority fostering service growth. However, the size and nature of the IFA sector provides an opportunity to move the sufficiency balance in the short to medium term through enhanced commissioning and home finding approaches. The findings of this study suggest that both aspects need to be pursued as part of an overall fostering sufficiency strategy.'

Most of the IFA homes lived in by Lancashire children (95% in 2022/23) are commissioned through either the new sub-regional commissioning arrangements (including Lancashire, Blackburn with Darwen, Blackpool and Cumbria) which began in June 2022 or through the Placements North West regional commissioning arrangements. The new sub regional arrangements enable a stronger, more collaborative relationship to be developed with key IFAs. Improved governance, sufficiency reporting and ensuring IFA costs are aligned to inflationary pressures utilising a clear methodology, has provided our partners with confidence that relationships, a local first principle and quick and appropriate fee decisions are prioritised. This approach has ensured that most of our agency foster homes are commissioned through our preferred contracted route. Only 4 IFA homes in 2022/23 were made with off-contract providers.

As well as seeking to maximise the use of local foster homes for local children, the sub-regional commissioning arrangements also focus on the development and provision of more enhanced foster homes for children who have more complex needs or behaviours. During 2022/23, 27 enhanced foster homes have been made (including for 9 children previously in a children's home i.e. 'step down'). By 31 March 2023, 74% of these children were still in their foster home. Of those that ended, one child moved to another enhanced foster care home, one moved to in-house foster care and another returned home. Regular forums whereby social workers can discuss children's foster care wishes and requirements, directly with IFAs, have been facilitated in order to improve matching as well as providing opportunities to share good practice and intelligence to promote service development.

Hard to Find Fostering Searches

To maximise the chances of securing suitable foster homes for our children, Lancashire adopts a dual search strategy for foster care requests (i.e. referrals are sent to in-house and agency providers at the same time), with the exception of searches for 0-8 year olds, which are sent to in-house only initially. During 2022/23, over 693 requests for agency foster homes were sent to providers by Lancashire's Access to Resources Team (ART). The most common request from Lancashire (44% in 2022/23) is for shorter term task centred care.

The proportion of foster searches which have been classed as 'hard-to-find' has increased from 24% in 2019/20 to 39% in 2022/23. A search is considered to be hard-to-find if it has required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' of providers was required due to a lack of offers from the electronic referral. Analysis of hard-to-find foster searches in 2022/23 showed that:

- 65% of hard-to-find requests were for children aged 11+ (173 children)
- 16% were for children who were part of a sibling group (of between 2-6) (44 children)
- 30% were searches for permanent foster homes (81 children)
- 13% were emergency (same day) requests (34 children) – down from 20% (56 children) in 2019/20
- 20% of the hard-to-find fostering searches in 2022/23 resulted in a young person needing to be placed in a children's home because a foster home had been unable to be found (53 children). This has increased from 9% (25 children) in 2019/20.

Both Lancashire's Access to Resources Team and Children's Social Care continue to report significant challenges in sourcing foster homes, not just for older aged children or those with more complex needs and behaviours, but also for children aged 8+ for whom previously we would not have struggled to find homes for.

Type of fostering request	% and No. of home search requests received	% and No. of each home search type classed as 'hard to find'
Task Centred foster home (up to 26 weeks)	44% (306)	13% (90)
Permanent foster home	22% (151)	12% (81)
Respite foster home	11% (75)	5% (32)
Mother and baby foster home	13% (89)	3% (18)
Step Down into Fostering home	5% (34)	3% (23)
Enhanced foster care home	5% (38)	
TOTAL	100% (693)	39% (267)

Enhanced Foster Care Provision

A key priority in Lancashire's Sufficiency Strategy (2017-20) was to develop Step Down into Fostering provision in collaboration with IFA providers, for young people with a long-term plan for fostering currently in residential care. A target was set to deliver 10 new Step Down into Fostering homes each year. As part of the new (June 2022) agency foster care agreement, an additional foster care type of support was also developed with IFA providers, Enhanced Care, aimed towards young people requiring a more sustained period of intensive support within their foster home.

A Step Down into Fostering lot has been included in Lancashire's Fostering Agreements since 2018. Between May 2018 (when the framework commenced) and March 2023, 39 stepdown homes were made: 6 during 2018/19, 6 during 2019/20, 10 during 2020/21, 8 during 2021/22 and 9 during 2022/23. An additional home was made pre framework through the initial pilot phase. Of these homes, 12 were still active in March 2023 and of those that have ended; 9 either remained but as a 'standard' foster care home, moved to another fostering home, transitioned to supported accommodation or returned home. 14 homes (35%) were unsuccessful, with the young people returning to residential care, which is comparable to the national benchmark of a 60% success rate.

Although the previous agreements have been successful in securing homes for some of the children and young people requiring a step down from residential care, the target of 10 stepdown homes each year has only been achieved once. In July 2020, a retainer scheme (which allows a retainer to be paid for carers ahead of a young person being matched to them, to prevent them being lost to other local authorities or utilised for mainstream homes) was introduced and this arrangement was successful in increasing the number of stepdown into fostering homes made and enabled the target of 10 homes to be met during 2020/21. This approach has been incorporated into the new agreement that commenced in June 2022.

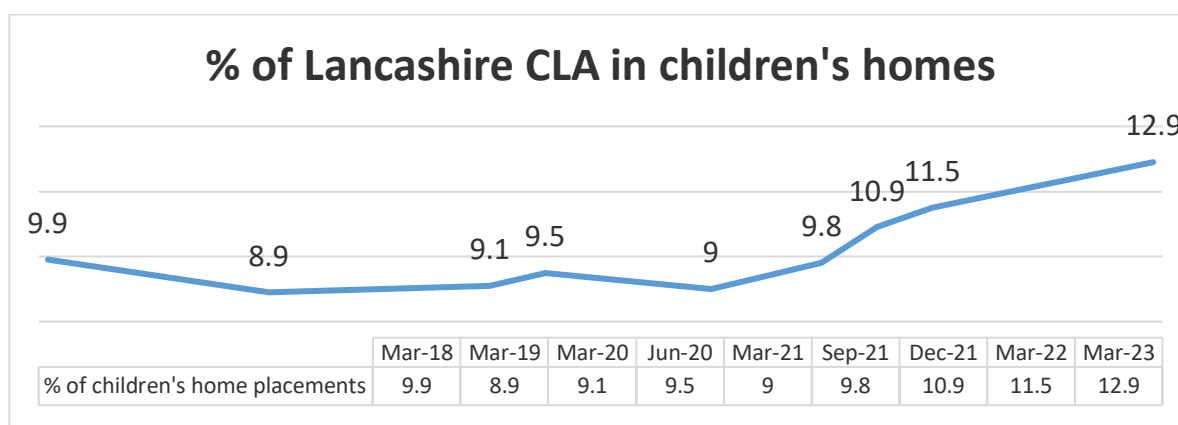
However, the target was not quite reached in 2021-23, with eight and nine stepdown homes commenced respectively. This is likely a result of the very challenging market conditions since the latter part of 2021/22, where a higher number of foster homes for children aged 8+ were proving hard to find.

In terms of Enhanced Care provision, since being included in the new agreement, 18 enhanced support homes have been commissioned with 12 still in place by March 2023. All those that have ended, they have either remained with foster carers with the enhancement removed, moved to another enhanced care arrangement, or moved to an in-house foster care home.

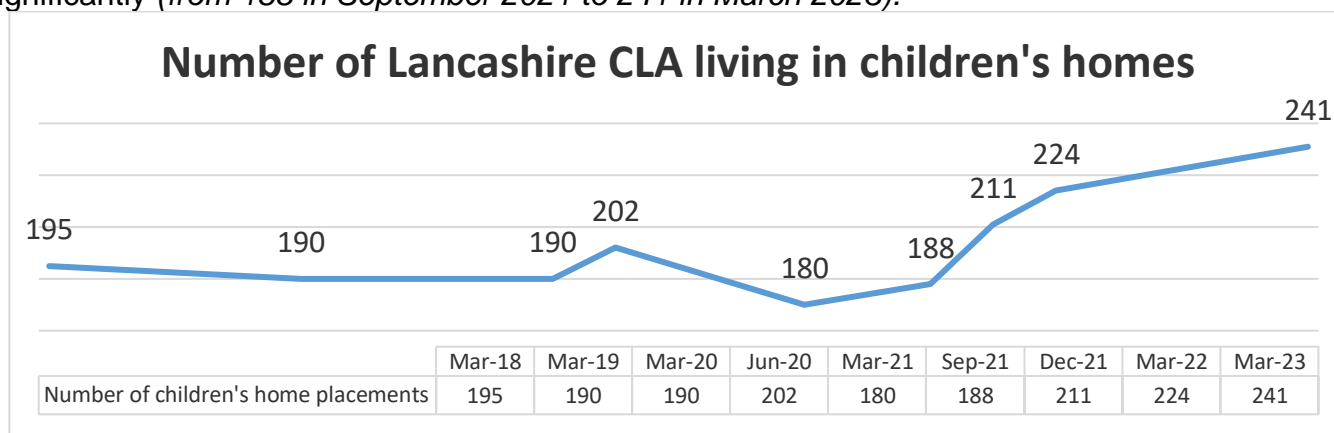
In addition to the IFA foster care agreements, Lancashire's in-house fostering service are developing a more enhanced foster care model.

CHILDREN'S HOMES

In March 2021, 9% of Lancashire CLA lived in a children's home, the same as the proportion nationally. However, whilst the proportion nationally remained at 9% by March 2022, the proportion in Lancashire rose significantly to 11.5%. This increase continued in 2022/23, and by March 2023 the proportion of Lancashire CLA living in a children's home was 12.9%.

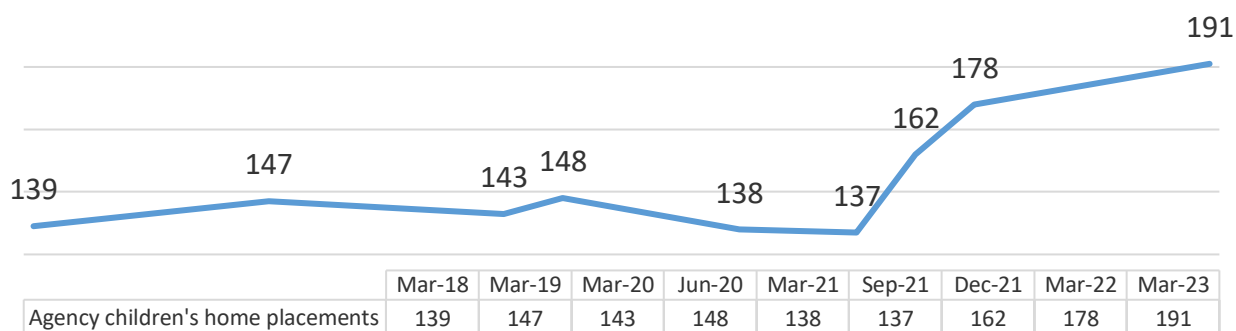


Prior to September 2021 (except for a brief increase following the end of the initial COVID lockdown period in June 2020), the number of Lancashire CLA living in a children's homes remained largely constant (*at around 180-190*), despite significant changes in the overall number of children in care during this period. Since September 2021, the number of Lancashire children living in a children's home (including Ofsted registered, CQC registered and unregistered children's homes) has risen significantly (*from 188 in September 2021 to 241 in March 2023*).



All the increased demand for children's homes has been met by agency providers, with 54 more children living in agency children's homes in March 2023, compared to September 2021.

Number of Lancashire CLA living in Agency children's homes



During 2022/23, Lancashire County Council sent out an average of 20 requests per month for a Lancashire child to live in a children's home. 218 Lancashire children started living in a new children's home in 2022/23, with 78% (170) of these in agency children's homes.

Profile of Children Living in Children's Homes

In Lancashire, a higher proportion of males are living in children's homes compared to the general CLA population. However, the proportion of males has been reducing since a significant rise in 2021, and is now closer to the general CLA population:

	% of children living in children's homes that are male	% of CLA population that are male
March 2020	58%	53%
March 2021	63%	53%
March 2022	60%	56%
March 2023	58%	56%

In March 2023, 5% of Lancashire CLA living in children's homes were aged under 11 (*which has increased from 3% in March 2020 and 2021*). 60% of children were aged 11-15 (*which has fluctuated in the past few years, from a high of 63% in March 2020, to 53% in 2021 and 57% in 2022*). 35% of children were aged 16+ (*which has fluctuated in the past few years, from a low of 34% in March 2020, to 40% in 2021 and 42% in 2022*).

Age of Lancashire CLA living in children's homes (March 2020 – March 2023)

AGE	TOTAL MARCH 2020	% IN 2020	TOTAL MARCH 2021	% IN 2021	TOTAL IN MARCH 2022	% IN MARCH 2022	TOTAL IN MARCH 2023	% IN MARCH 2023
UNDER 11	6	3.2%	4	2.8%	11	4.9%	12	5.0%
11-13 YEARS	39	20.5%	36	20%	37	16.5%	46	19.1%
14-15 YEARS	81	42.6%	67	37.2%	81	36.2%	98	40.7%
AGED 16+	64	33.7%	72	40%	95	42.4%	85	35.3%
TOTAL	190		180		224		241	

More than half of all requests for children's homes are for smaller homes (caring for 3 children or less) that can enable children who require it to live with a smaller number of children or provide additional resources to meet a higher complexity of need/ behaviour (i.e. higher staffing ratios of at

least 1:1). In 2019/20 52% of all children's home requests were for smaller homes. In 2022/23 this increased to 55% of all requests.

There has been an increase in the proportion of children's home searches that are considered to be hard-to-find (i.e. required 3 or more searches or a targeted 'ring round' due to a lack of offers). Almost a third (30%) of children's home searches in 2019/20 were classed as hard-to-find. This increased to 40% in 2021/22 and 43% in 2022/23, with most of these hard-to-find searches being for a smaller children's home able to meet the needs of children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours.

Securing homes for children with the following needs/ behaviours is particularly challenging:

- Complex mental health needs
- Criminal behaviours, including high risk of exploitation, damage to property, possession of knives/ weapons, and arson
- Aggression/ violence
- Harmful sexualised behaviours
- Autism
- Children with physical and/ or learning disabilities

Lancashire County Council's Internal Children's Home Provision

Lancashire County Council's Children's Home Service manage 15 children's homes, able to care for up to 52 CLA (full time), up to 4 children at any one time in the Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) (edge of care/ respite) home and up to 12 children at any one time in the overnight short break homes for children with disabilities:

Type of in-house children's home	Number of homes	Total number of beds
Large (6 bed) mainstream home	7	42
Smaller (3 bed) home - more complex behaviours	3	9
Short term crisis home	1	1
Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) – Edge of care	1	4
Overnight short break home for children with disabilities	3	12

As of end of March 2023, occupancy within Lancashire's in-house children's homes (excluding the ASU and overnight short break homes) was 96%.

Due to the continued challenge of securing smaller, more specialist and crisis homes for children with a higher complexity of need/ behaviours, further in-house children's homes are being developed and existing provision is being repurposed. Once completed, Lancashire County Council's Children's Home Service will manage 21 homes, able to care for up to 60 CLA (full time), up to 12 children at any one time in the edge of care/ respite (ASU) homes and up to 12 children at any one time in the overnight short break homes for children with disabilities:

Type of in-house children's home	Number of homes	Total number of beds	Expected operational date
Large (6 bed) mainstream home	6	36	Already operating
Smaller (3 bed) home - more complex behaviours	5	15	3 already operating; 1 expected Sept 2024 and 1 expected Sept 2025

Specialist (2 bed) short term homes: 1 for children displaying aggressive or criminal behaviours 1 for children with Autism, physical and/ or learning disabilities 1 for children displaying harmful sexualised behaviour	3	6	Expected Nov 2023 Timescales dependent on securing an alternative home for young person currently in the home Expected Mar 2025
Specialist (3 bed) short term home for children with complex mental health needs (in collaboration with health)	1	3	Expected Summer 2025
Adolescent Support Unit (ASU) - Edge of care	3	12	1 already operating; 1 expected June 2024 and 1 still TBC
Overnight short break home for children with disabilities	3	12	Already operating

Agency Children's Home Provision

Children's homes are not evenly distributed across England. As of March 2023, over a quarter of all children's homes were in the North West of England (25.3%).

Lancashire has the largest number of children's homes within the local authority area than any of the 149 local authorities in England. 7% of all children's homes in England are in Lancashire County Council's boundaries, with most (210 out of 226 as of 1 March 2023) operated by agency providers.

Local Authority Areas with the Highest Number of Ofsted Registered Children's Homes in their area	Number of Ofsted Registered Children's Homes (as of 1 March 23)
Lancashire	226
Staffordshire	149
Kent	94
Shropshire	78
Birmingham	73
Hampshire	68
Leicestershire	64
Cumbria	63
Derbyshire	62
TOTAL IN ENGLAND	3209

Almost half of all children's homes in Lancashire County Council's boundaries (49%) are in four district council areas: Lancaster, West Lancashire, Rossendale and Wyre. 42% of the new Ofsted registered children's homes that have opened in Lancashire (15 out of 36) since 1 January 2022 (and are still operating by March 2023) are in two district council areas: Fylde and Preston.

DISTRICT	Number of Ofsted Children's Homes (as of 1 Mar 2023)	Proportion of total homes in LCC in each district	Number of Ofsted children's homes opened since 1 st Jan 2022 (and still open by 1 Mar 2023)	Proportion of new Ofsted homes opened in each district in LCC compared to total opened across LCC since 1 Jan 2022 (and still open by 1 Mar 23)
Lancaster	29	12.8%	2	5.6%

West Lancs	28	12.4%	1	2.8%
Rossendale	27	11.9%	0	0%
Wyre	26	11.5%	4	11.1%
Fylde	23	10.2%	8	22.2%
Preston	22	9.7%	7	19.4%
South Ribble	21	9.3%	5	13.9%
Hyndburn	13	5.8%	5	13.9%
Burnley	13	5.8%	0	0%
Chorley	10	4.4%	1	2.8%
Pendle	10	4.4%	0	0%
Ribble Valley	4	1.8%	3	8.3%
TOTAL	226		36	

Theoretically there are more than enough Ofsted registered children's homes within the County Council's boundaries to meet Lancashire's demand for such provision. However, only 38% of agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire have Lancashire children living there. In March 2023, Lancashire children were living in only 80 out of the 210 agency Ofsted registered children's homes in Lancashire County Council's boundaries. Lancashire children were living in 50 homes outside of Lancashire (*45 in the North West, 1 in a neighbouring town in Yorkshire and 4 at a distance – in Rotherham, Staffordshire, Wolverhampton and Hull*).

	No. of agency children's homes lived in by Lancashire children	No. of agency children's homes in Lancashire	No. of Lancashire children living in Lancashire agency children's homes	% of agency children's homes in Lancashire being used by Lancashire children
March 2020	104	145	62	43%
March 2022	108	185	64	35%
March 2023	130	210	80	38%

Lancashire County Council is seeking to increase the use of local children's homes for local children through:

- a) Lancashire's own children's home commissioning arrangements (Pseudo Dynamic Purchasing System – PDPS) which commenced in August 2022. These arrangements enable closer, more collaborative working with children's home providers to increase the use of local homes for local children. All eligible children's home providers are encouraged to join these arrangements (which are opened regularly to new applicants). Any eligible provider who is interested in working in a much more collaborative way to increase local homes is encouraged to apply to be on Tier 1.
- b) A block contracting agreement, which has been in place since November 2019. Three providers were commissioned to deliver eight block contract beds each (including a mix of mainstream, complex and solo homes) for the exclusive use of Lancashire children. The number of beds delivered through the block contract agreement can be further increased (up to a maximum of 50 beds) based on need and individual provider performance.

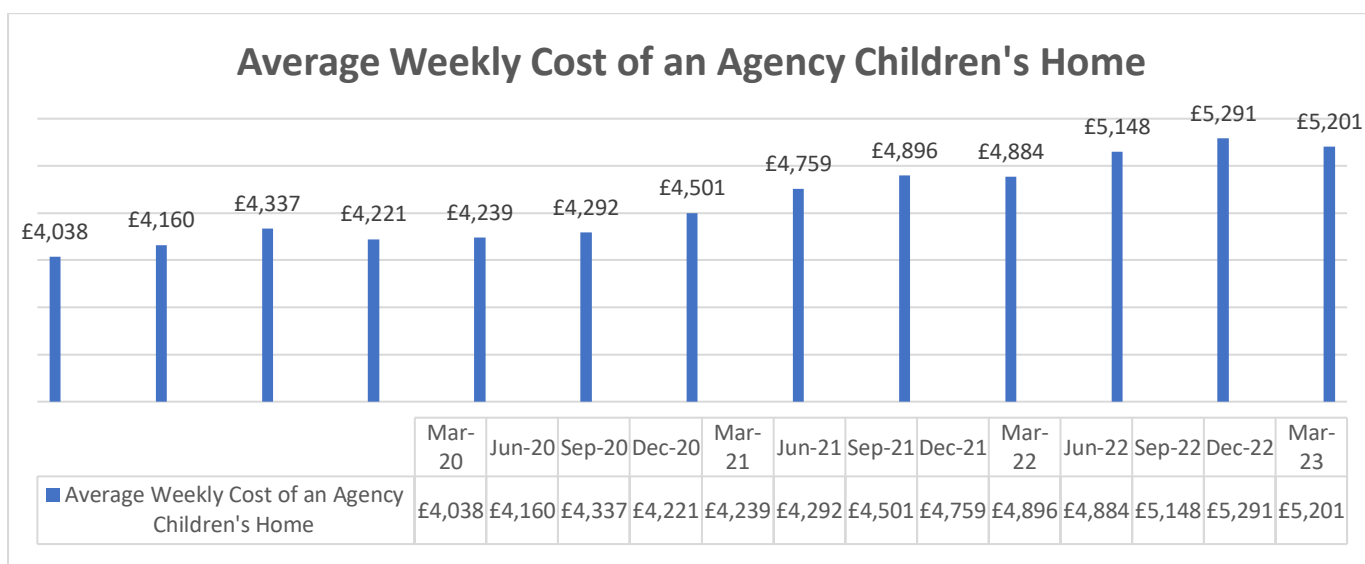
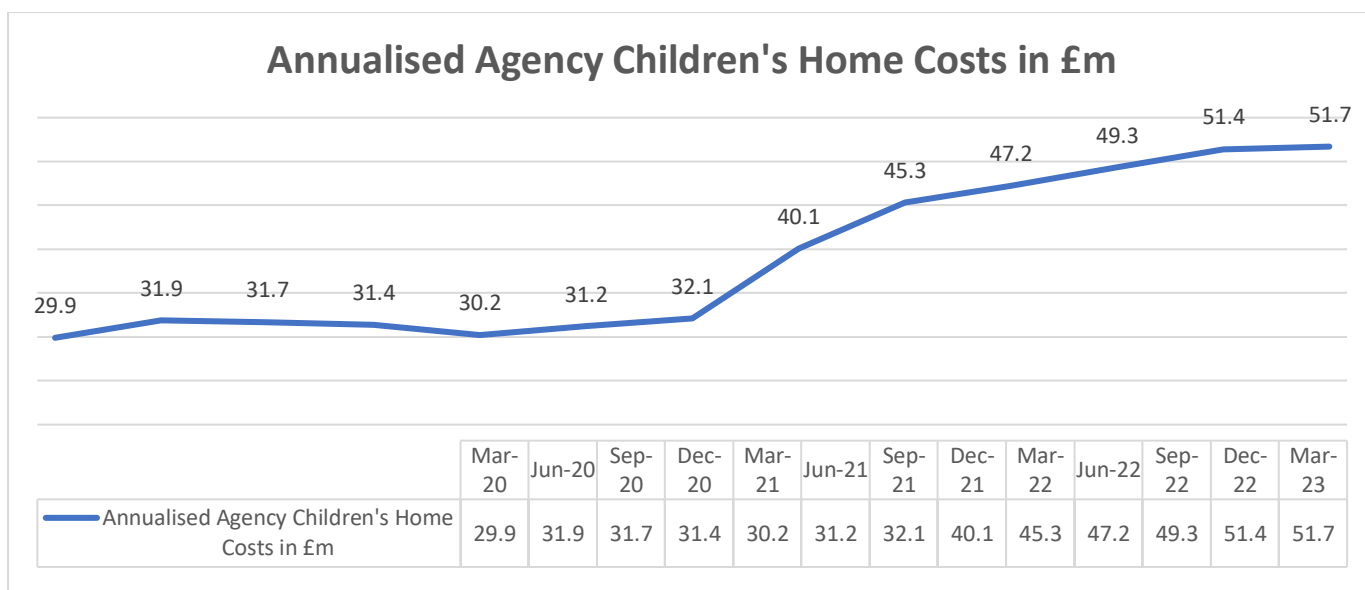
Lancashire County Council is also named on the Placements North West Dynamic Purchasing System (DPS), which is used to source children's homes not able to be found through the block contract or Lancashire's own commissioning arrangements.

As of 31 March 2023, 70% of children living in agency children's homes were being cared for by providers who were on Lancashire's children's home commissioning arrangements. A further 12% of children were being cared for by providers who were part of the Placements North West regional

commissioning arrangements. 18% of children were being cared for by off-contract providers, who were not part of either the Lancashire or regional commissioning arrangements.

Agency Children's Home Costs

The amount Lancashire County Council spends on agency children's homes continues to rise. Between March 2020 and March 2023, the annualised cost of Lancashire children living in agency children's homes increased by £21.8m. This is as a result of both an increased number of children living in an agency children's home (53 more in March 2023 compared to March 2020) and a significant rise in the average weekly cost of these homes (£1,163 more in March 2023 compared to March 2020).



In March 2023, 55 Lancashire children were living in agency children's homes which were high cost (i.e. cost more than £6,000 per week).

SECURE WELFARE HOMES

Despite increased numbers of children in care, the number of secure welfare homes utilised by Lancashire was the same in March 2020 as it was in July 2017 (3). Lancashire tended to have an average of two children living in secure welfare homes at any one time.

However, due to unprecedented high demand nationally, no secure welfare homes were utilised by Lancashire during 2020/21, despite several Lancashire young people meeting the threshold for a secure welfare home. In the two years since March 2021, only two Lancashire young people lived in a secure welfare home. Both of these young people were in a secure welfare homes in Scotland.

Secure welfare homes are likely to be at a distance from Lancashire, with only two out of the 15 secure homes in England and Wales based in the North West.

FAMILY ASSESSMENT CENTRES

Lancashire's use of residential family assessment centres had more than doubled between 2017 to 2022, with 22 children living in family assessment centres, as of 31 March 2022 (*compared to 10 in 2017*). As of March 2023, the number of children in residential family centres had reduced to 12.

More family assessment centres have opened locally, enabling more Lancashire children to be placed within the County Council's boundaries. Previously most children in this type of provision were placed outside of Lancashire (89%). This reduced to 50% by March 2022, with only 4 homes needing to be made at a distance from Lancashire (*all in South Yorkshire*). By March 2023, the proportion of children placed outside of Lancashire in residential family assessment centres reduced to 25%, with only 1 home needing to be made at a distance (*in South Yorkshire*).

Residential family assessment centres are not difficult to source for our children in care and therefore are not considered to be an identified gap in local provision.

RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS

The number of children living in residential schools had remained largely consistent (*between 16-20 children*) between 2017 and 2022. As of March 2022, 18 Lancashire children and young people were placed in residential schools, with 39% of children living in Lancashire and the rest in other North West Local Authorities or a neighbouring Yorkshire town. As of March 2023, the number of children had reduced to 14, with 43% living in Lancashire and the rest in other North West Local Authorities.

UNREGULATED PROVISION

A policy on the use of crisis and unregulated homes was introduced in Lancashire in January 2020. This policy outlines the processes to be undertaken when considering such homes and the risk mitigations in place to ensure that all steps are taken to avoid children and young people being placed in unregistered provision (i.e. provision that is not registered with Ofsted but should be) and any child under the age of 16 being placed in any type of unregulated provision. The policy also includes ensuring that wherever possible young people aged 16 but still of statutory school age are placed in regulated provision.

The policy includes a higher level of monitoring and oversight from Children's Social Care, Independent Reviewing Officers and the Access to Resources Team for any unregulated homes which are classified as high risk, including any known unregistered homes and any unregulated homes where it is considered there is a potential that elements of care (and not just support) may be required/ are being provided, due to a child's age, complexity of need or high costs.

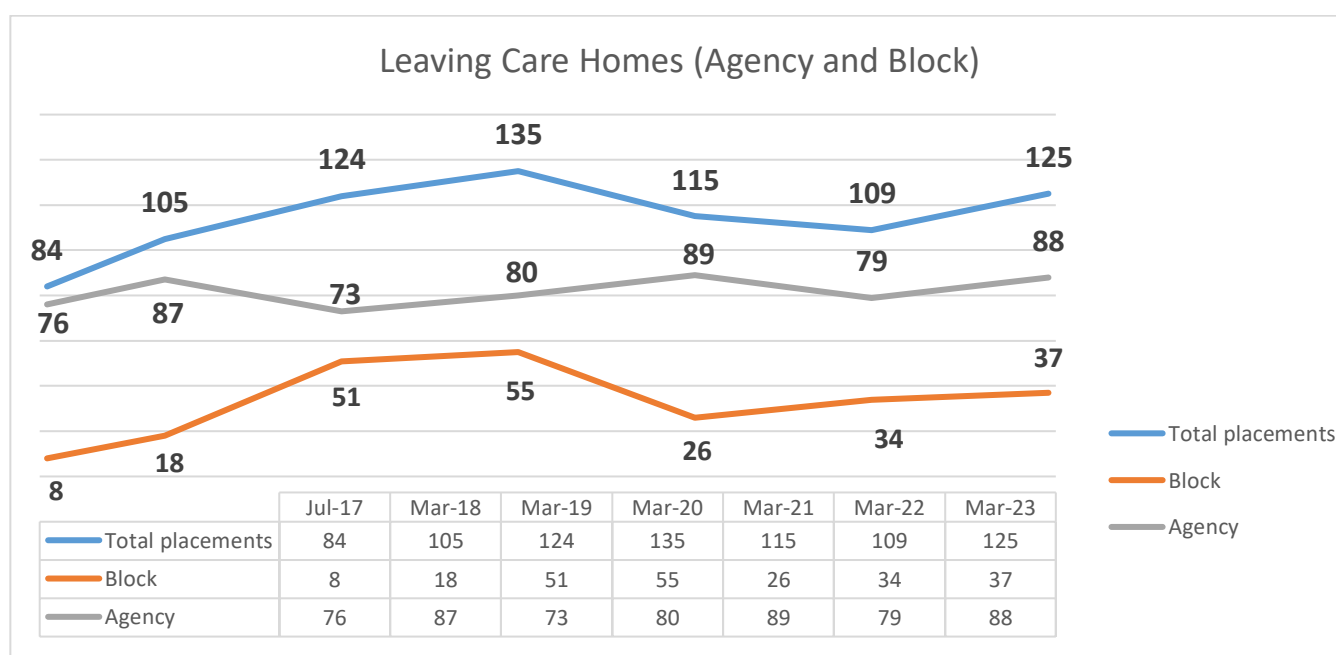
16+ SUPPORTED ACCOMMODATION/ INDEPENDENT LIVING (SAIL) PROVISION

Approximately 200 young people who are in the care of the Authority turn 18 each year and require a transitional home at some stage between the age of 16 and 18 to support their pathway to a long-term stable home.

The number of young people starting to be looked after who were aged 16-17 subsequently increased to 97 in the year to 31 March 2021, reduced to 80 in the following year and has increased to 89 in the year to 31 March 2023. The proportion each year who started to be looked after under section 20 through the Homeless Protocol reduced noticeably from 55% (53 young people) to March 2021, to 33% (26 young people) to March 2022 and has continued at 33% (29 young people) in the year to March 2023.

The number of 16/17 year olds who are in our care is higher than in the previous two years, however the proportion who live in supported accommodation type services has remained consistent over the three years, at approximately 30%.

As at 31 st March	Total no. 16/17 year olds	No. in supported accommodation	% in supported accommodation
2023	395	124	31%
2022	367	108	29%
2021	375	112	30%



One of our key objectives is to ensure that young people have a broad range of housing options available to them. Our supported accommodation block contracts provide 378 beds, across the following service types:

- Core 24/7 building-based accommodation (207)
- Visiting support – a mix of building-based and dispersed (134)
- Supported Lodgings (22)

- Teenage Parent services (15)

Under Lancashire's Joint Homeless Protocol, the block contract services can be accessed by young people aged 16-21¹ for up to 2 years. This includes children who are in our care, young people who are assessed under the 16/17 Joint Homeless Protocol, and 18+ Care Leavers. One of the key objectives identified in the Lancashire's 2017 - 2020 Sufficiency Strategy was to prioritise access for 16/17-year-olds (both care leavers and young people presenting as homeless). This is a continued priority and will be strengthened through the revision of the Joint 16/17 Homelessness Protocol.

During 2022-23 the Access to Resources team received 626 referrals for supported accommodation searches, of which 405 (65%) were for young people aged 16-17, a 3% increase from the previous year (606 referrals). Of the 241 homes that were made during the year, 78 (32%) were with block-commissioned services, which represented a reduction from 48% during 2021-22. The proportion is reflective of the split between block (31%) and spot-commissioned (69%) homes at the end of March 2023, but shows the scale of the shift compared to 41% block provision in March 2019.

When a suitable block home cannot be sourced either due to availability, or because of the individual needs of a young person, homes are sourced through the North West regional Flexible Purchasing System (FPS). This framework offers smaller group living, floating support with accommodation (visiting support), and more bespoke solo arrangements for young people.

There are currently 75 providers on the framework and capacity is sufficient within the northwest region to meet Lancashire's need. For example, at 31st March 2023 94% of spot-commissioned homes were made with framework providers with the 6% off-contract arrangements being due to specific vulnerabilities of young people.

The success of the current commissioning arrangements is evident:

- 120 of 125 (96%) of the SaILS homes at 31 March 2023 are delivered by block commissioned or regional framework providers. Two of the five off-contract homes are transitional arrangements from care to support and one young person has a CQC-registered package of support with an unregulated off-contract provider.
- 197 young people categorised as high priority were living in block-commissioned homes at 31 March 2023 (57% of the total occupied beds), along with 81 young people categorised as medium priority – in broad terms young people aged 18-21 who have been previously known to Children's Social Care. Despite the challenges described above, this total (278 high and medium priority category) is the same as at 31 March 2022.

March 2023 data				
Capacity	Occupied	High Priority	Medium Priority	Low Priority
378	346	197	81	68
% of occupied total		57%	23%	20%
% of total beds		52%	21%	18%

strong and

relationships with block providers, through a dedicated team focussed on SAIL home finding and contract monitoring function.

- Continued engagement working

¹ Up to age 25 in some circumstances

Partnership working will be further strengthened between providers, district housing authorities and the Local Authority due to the introduction of regulatory reform in October 2023. Registration is required from Supported Accommodation providers from October with Ofsted Inspections commencing in April 2024.

New Standards and Regulations have been introduced to improve standards within the sector and providers are being supported by the Local Authority to meet the Standards, where necessary.

There are some key challenges that impact on decisions on where children can live:

- Lancashire has a lower proportion of local authority owned housing and a lower proportion of social housing compared to similar large authorities, and Lancashire's District Housing Authorities are experiencing unprecedented demand for housing (eg increased homeless presentations, lack of temporary accommodation and affordable move on options). The increase in demand for social and private rented housing means that young people are struggling to secure a suitable, affordable, long-term home at the right time making it more difficult for young people to move on from supported accommodation to an affordable tenancy.
- Rents charged by private landlords can be higher than the prevailing Local Housing Allowance rate adding to the challenges that young people face. It is evident that delayed move on is continuing to have an impact on the availability of our block provision for high priority young people, and is resulting in a higher proportion of homes being spot-commissioned than in recent years.
- Whilst the block contracts provide a wide range of service options, the provision at district-level across the county is inconsistent in terms of the number of beds and the types of services. Supported lodgings and dispersed visiting support services are not currently commissioned Lancashire-wide for example, and, constrained to some degree by the options that are available, the building-based services vary in terms of size and service delivery model.
- Unless a property is being sourced specifically for an individual young person, the framework provision is limited in terms of location. Coverage is broadly limited to three of the 12 districts in the county (Preston, Burnley and Hyndburn) and there is significant disparity even within those three districts, for example approximately 70% of group living provision is in the Preston district. Despite the large number of block-commissioned beds it is evident from our home finding data that successful matching (preferred versus actual home location) is much lower in some districts compared to others. At 31st March 2023 20 young people (23% of spot-commissioned homes on that date) lived out of area, 8 of the 20 living in the neighbouring district of Blackpool.
- Homes that are commissioned through the framework have a higher cost than the block services and consequently cannot be self-funded by young people post-18, thus creating a further move for young people that is dictated by age rather than the preparedness of the young person. These provisions are not recognised as supported accommodation within the allocations policies of our District Housing Choice Based Lettings Schemes, meaning that young people are not prioritised - further exacerbating the move-on challenges.
- Utilisation of our supported lodgings services continues to be much lower than would be expected for the size of Lancashire, averaging 58% during 2022/23 (but an improvement from 40% in 2021/22). Matching young people with hosts can be difficult for several reasons including health/education/employment needs, and location.

- An increasing number of young people have more complex needs that requiring higher levels of support in solo provision which is increasing our average cost of spot-commissioned SALL homes.

To address some of the challenges:

- Lancashire's first Local House Project is now fully established in Preston, enabling 8-10 young people each year to be supported to move into their own home prior to turning 18. The Preston project is currently being supported by four local registered social landlords and the collaborative working has already shown wider benefits to housing work in the district.
- A Care Leaver Protocol has been developed in conjunction with our District Housing Authorities that formalised the commitment of partners to a corporate parenting approach and set out roles and responsibilities of partner agencies to ensure that suitable and stable homes can be offered to our care leavers in a consistent way wherever possible.
- Care Leavers' Lasting Homes Panels were launched in June 2022. The panels are multi-agency forums that young people attend with their social workers to plan for their future homes. The panels have strengthened joint working between Social Care, District Housing and supported accommodation providers, and the feedback has been very positive with good housing outcomes having been achieved.
- A dedicated social worker post to support our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children has been established. Once appointed, the postholder will work with Lancashire's Refugee Integration Team to provide ongoing support and liaison to ensure that young people are settled and have their needs met on an ongoing basis.

COMMISSIONING PRIORITIES

Prevention

Key to reducing our overall CLA numbers will be reducing the number of children who start to become looked after, by **providing the means for families to become more resilient and stay together where it is safe and in the child's best interests to do so**. We will do this by:

- Embedding the Family Safeguarding Model;
- Delivering the multi-agency Early Help strategy;
- Delivering the DfE funded Supporting Families; Investing in Practice programme to implement the Family Group Conference (FGC) Daybreak model;
- Ensuring our expanded Outreach Service is used effectively to support families of children and young people on the edge of care;
- Expanding our respite provision for children and young people on the edge of care through the development of further Adolescent Support Unit provision;
- Testing out new models of working, such as the Safe Families for Children approach, which will provide additional support for families of children on the edge of care;
- Strengthening our Targeted Youth Support offer, aligned to the implementation of new structures within the Children's Social Care and Children and Family Wellbeing teams;
- Ensuring that all new Section 20 Agreements (where there are not child protection concerns) are only accepted after families have accessed the above offers;

- Systematically evaluating the impact of our preventative approaches and reshaping accordingly.
- Rigorously enforcing our Section 20 Charging Policy;
- Prioritising prevention activity within the 16/17 Joint Homelessness Strategy, in partnership with third sector organisations and internal Local Authority services.

Placements with Parents or other person with parental responsibility

We will continue work to **reduce the proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility** by:

- Ensuring effective and robust care planning, with contingency planning;
- Supporting our staff to work more confidently within the court arena and with legal colleagues;
- Continuing to review all of our children who are placed at home with parents and seek revocation of orders where appropriate;
- Ensuring that where appropriate these families are supported by our wellbeing, prevention and early help services as they step down from high level intervention.

Foster Care

We will continue to **increase the number of in-house foster homes provided** by:

- Ensuring robust home finding processes are in place to make the most effective use of in-house foster carers;
- Implementing a more targeted marketing strategy to address gaps in provision, including in underserved areas and homes for older children and young people, sibling groups and parent and child.
- Implementing an increased offer of support to in-house carers to support retention including:
 - Establishment of a Foster Care Academy that supports the induction and skill building of newly approved foster carers;
 - Establishment of a Mentoring Scheme that supports new foster carers to feel supported during their first year of approval;
 - Establishment of a Fostering Communities Project that supports networking and support for foster carers that are isolated;
 - Establishment of an Enrichment Programme that supports the networking and family life of our fostering community;
 - Participation in the Reflective Fostering programme that is a study that supports foster carers to have a better understanding of the lived experiences of the child and thereby feel better equipped to support the children in their care.
- Explore the opportunities to recruit foster carers creatively and innovatively by establishing an advanced foster carer scheme and exploring the recruitment of foster carers from a wider community than just Lancashire.

We will continue to **work collaboratively with agency fostering providers to increase the number of local children placed with local IFA carers.**

Adoption

We will continue to seek to **match children who have a plan of adoption with the most suitable adopters as quickly as possible** by:

- Increasing the pool of approved adopters to support matching with Lancashire and Blackpool children;
- Minimising delay by prioritising early permanence and early family finding, where appropriate;
- Developing a team in Adoption Lancashire and Blackpool that focuses on family finding at the earliest opportunity;
- Establishing an Adoption Support Team that supports families post adoption in order to prevent adoption breakdowns.

Children's Home Provision

Ensuring appropriate children's homes are available for our children in care, particularly those who require additional support and resources will continue to be a key priority. We will do this by:

- Developing further short-term in-house crisis/ reception homes to de-escalate behaviours and support the sourcing of the right home to best meet need;
- Developing further smaller capacity in-house children's homes;
- Continuing to work collaboratively with our block providers to maximise use of contracted beds, including the potential to further increase the number of block beds delivered, based on need and provider performance;
- Continuing to work collaboratively with Lancashire's contracted providers to maximise the use of local homes for local children and address gaps in provision;
- Developing relationships with local and regional providers who do not currently offer homes to Lancashire children;
- Working with the market to develop bespoke options to meet the needs of our children and young people with the most complex emotional and behavioural needs.
- Developing alternative options to better support children and young people with the most complex emotional and behavioural needs to remain safely within a family setting.

16+ Supported Accommodation/ Independent Living (SAIL) Provision

We aspire for 100% of our care leavers to live in suitable accommodation. Key commissioning and operational priorities for 2023/24 are to:

- Support our providers in adapting to the changes they will experience from the regulatory reforms, to minimise the impact that the reforms will have on sufficiency in the market.
- Re-commission our block provision to have new contracts in place by early 2024/25 that address some of the inconsistencies of service provision throughout the county. Plans include extending our supported lodgings and dispersed visiting support service to a broader market and re-balancing our building-based provision to better meet demand.
- Establish a second Local House Project elsewhere in the county to achieve positive outcomes and a successful transition to independence for an additional cohort of 8-10 young people. A third project is planned by early 2024.

- Work more collaboratively with the private provider market to increase provision and choice in districts where demand is not currently being met, with a focus on sustainable, affordable homes.
- Commission more tailored services for our Unaccompanied Asylum-Seeking Children, contracting with providers who have a strong focus on ensuring the best outcomes for this cohort of young people. A further priority is to work more closely with Housing partners to improve young people's transition to independent living where Leave to Remain status is granted.
- Develop and strengthen our partnership work with District councils to ensure that the housing needs of Care Leavers are considered in their strategic housing planning and building applications. A re-established Housing Reference Group will regularly bring partners together to ensure that the principles and joint working practices outlined in the Care Leavers Protocol are embedded, in addition to the 16/17 Joint Homelessness Protocol.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

The following Key Performance Indicators will be monitored and reported quarterly through the Data, Quality and Performance (DQP) Group:

Key Performance Indicator	Baseline Levels (March 2020)	Current Levels	Target	Impact since March 2020
Reduction in proportion of placements with parents or other person with parental responsibility	15.5%	9.7% (March 2023)	13.5%	↓ 5.8%
Increase the proportion of children living in foster homes	62.3%	64.6% (March 2023)	70%	↑ 2.3%
Number of Step Down into Fostering Homes commenced	6 per annum	9 per annum (March 2023)	10 per annum	↑ 3 p/a
Reduction in the proportion of CLA in Children's Homes provision	9.1%	12.9% (March 2023)	8.3%	↑ 3.8%
Increase the usage of block contract supported accommodation provision for high priority young people	53% of occupied beds	57% of occupied beds (March 2023)	60% of occupied beds	↑ 4%

